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EDITORIAL

This summer has seen the most remarkable influx of huge numbers of birds of a variety of species and a surfeit of rarities from the North to the coast and places in the South – or is it that we are getting more birders out into the field finding more birds and reporting their observations. I think it is probably a combination of both.

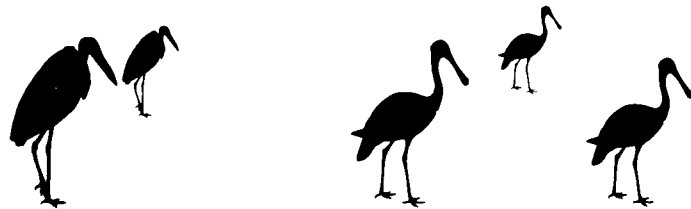
This year, some of the biggest numbers of Abdim's Storks I have ever seen, arrived and stayed even though there was a general lack of rain and *Koringkrieks!* Around Etosha, through the central parts of the country to south of Windhoek there were storks everywhere. Huge numbers of coastal terns, skuas, waders and pelagic seabirds were reported from the Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour areas. Large numbers of Western Redfooted Kestrels were reported from the central part of the country for most of the summer and huge numbers of European Swifts were reported at the same time. But for me the interesting thing has been the number of reports we have received of other species of interest (see *SHORT NOTES*) and the number of people reporting these. I can only hope that people's interest has again been stimulated to get out birding and that, although local, *Lanioturdus* is starting to provide the medium for pricking people's interest. This is what it is there for, and I cannot stress enough to you all that without your support and contributions the magazine (and the club) will fail.

Thanks for all your support and keep on birding.

cherry on the top – this bird is also known as a Confused Eagle being neither Jim nor Jean!

A few days later we were again entertained by Dawn who arranged for us to go with her to a heronry on a private farm in the Nuy Valley, not far from Robertson. This heronry was started by the present owner's grandfather way back in 1936 when he built an irrigation dam. Various water birds took up residence and he, being farsighted, increased the dam area and built another and allowed the birds to come and go at will, with the result that the trees surrounding the dams are alive with countless numbers of African Spoonbills, Blackheaded, Grey, Purple, and Blackcrowned Night Herons, three species of ibis, being the Sacred, Glossy and Hadeda, Whitebreasted and Reed Cormorants as well as the Darter, all nesting and feeding their young which, in some instances, were virtually as large as the adult bird. Also seen were Little, Yellowbilled and Cattle Egrets. Waterfowl were represented by Egyptian Geese, Yellowbilled Duck, Cape Teal, Cape Shoveller, Southern Pouchard and Spurwinged Geese. We were also very lucky to spot a pair of Whitefaced Duck which, according to Dawn, were the first to have been seen on this particular stretch of water – the nearest she was aware of, were at the Paarl sewerage works – and joy of joys, a Fish Eagle.

If anyone is ever in that area and wishes for an extremely pleasant educational birding day please contact Dawn – she said she would be happy to assist. She can be reached at PO Box 88, Robertson, or phone Robertson 2311.



SUSPENDED BREEDING: EFFECTS OF THE CURRENT DROUGHT IN ETOSHA

Timothy O Osborne
PO Box 22, Okaukuejo, via Outjo

The 1997/98 rain season in the western two-thirds of Etosha National Park started early in September 1997 with moderate rains, and continued through to the end of December when the full effects of El Nino manifested itself. In January and February the weather got very hot with record temperatures up to 43° C and dry, westerly winds. Occasionally clouds would build up, but the rain was extremely sporadic with light showers. At Okaukuejo only 28 mm of rain fell in February – the normal is closer to 200 mm. As one drives around the park, many areas appear to have had little or no growth of grass, while a few areas, mainly in the east, have a normal grass crop.

The effects of the interruption of the rainy season on the bird life are of interest to me since one of the objectives of our study of Kori Bustards, *Ardeotis kori*, was to determine the type of mating systems, display territoriality and nesting areas. In November and December we were following our radio-tagged birds on a fairly frequent schedule because we found if we gave them too much time between tracking sessions, they would walk out of radio range and then we would have to spend extra time trying to find them. During the same time, people reported to us that males were displaying on the plains. None of our radio-tagged males were displaying on the plains – they were mainly in mopane woodland – and our radio-tagged females were not near the displaying males. About the time our males reached the plains and started to display and our females were also on the plains, the rains ended. All the birds were out on the plains but display activities were only early in the morning and late in the evening when the temperatures were cooler. According to Niethammer (1940), males normally call and display throughout the day in Namibia.

We were all set to observe our birds and, suddenly, we discovered that the breeding season was over before we thought it had started. By late January the birds drifted off the plains back into the woodland and we sat back to

analyze what had happened. One of nine radio-tagged females laid an egg and produced one chick. Three of our females still had yearlings in tow. In 1997, between April and June, we found 70 broods with an average of 1.52 chicks. Fifty percent of the broods consisted of two or more chicks. During February and March 1998 we only found nine broods with an average of 1.22 chicks per brood. Only 22% of the broods were comprised of twins and no triplets were found.

The interruption in the breeding season was not limited to Kori Bustards. At Okaukuejo Helmeted Guineafowl, *Numida meleagris*, wander the tourist camp and several flocks have birds with distinctive features, unusual casque shapes, missing toes, and healed fractures. These birds often visit our camp site to drink at the bird bath and we are able to recognize individual birds. 1997 was a bumper breeding season in the park with some adults accompanied by 20 chicks. In December males were chasing each other around and started to pair up with females. In January, the pairs would still come to the bird bath but by the end of February, they had not nested and rejoined the remaining flocks. On several farms adjoining the southern park boundary, farmers have mentioned to me that they have also noticed that guinea fowl flocks have not broken up into pairs. One farmer so far has only found one guinea fowl brood.

As we drive the plains looking for Kori Bustards we have also observed Whitequilled Korhaans, *Eupodotis afraoides*, and Blue cranes, *Anthropoides paradiseus*. In 1997, the park was full of Whitequilled Korhaan broods with three being the commonest brood size, but we found up to four in a brood. We did not count all the broods we encountered but we estimated an average brood size of 2.5. Maclean (1993) gives the clutch size as one (85%) or two eggs (15%), and none of the literature recorded any more than two eggs. To date, we are still seeing female korhaans feeding on the plains and males have ceased their aerial displays. We have not seen any chicks

In 1997 after the rains, most of the Blue Cranes we saw had two chicks in attendance. In December we saw single cranes feeding on the plains and assumed that the other of the pair was off nesting somewhere. By late

January pairs of cranes were on the plains and no chicks have been seen. We assume that the crane breeding season has also been affected by the drought.

The literature is full of references about the effects of drought on birds in arid climates but most of the observations have been anecdotal like our observations on the cranes and korhaans. Our radio-tagged Kori Bustards are giving us valuable data into the mechanisms which initiate breeding. Negative data is always good science but often boring. We hope that the predictions of good rains in March and April are correct. Then we can see if the breeding season is *interruptus* or *finis*.

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WHITEBELLIED KORHAAN IN NAMIBIA: A FIRST RECORD FROM THE ANDONI GRASSLANDS

Christopher Hines & John Mendelsohn

While working in the Andoni grassland area on the northern boundary of Etosha National Park, we found a single female Whitebellied Korhaan in tall grass on the boundary fence. We had a clear view of the bird as it was drinking from a small rainwater puddle in the road and then as it walked off a couple of metres into some tall grass. The striking thing both of us noticed was the rich brownish-red tones of the back, the mottled appearance (neither barred or chevroned which separates it from Northern Black, Redcrested and Blackbellied), the grey, black and white v-shaped crown patch and the pale belly (which separates it from Northern Black and Redcrested, and from the male Blackbellied). The bird was not tall and leggy and had a pale reddish base to the bill which separates it from the female Blackbellied Korhaan. We subsequently got the bird to fly. The pale